

Views of American Democracy and Support for Political Violence: First Report from a Nationally-Representative Survey

Sizable minorities of the American population are willing to engage in violence for political aims.

Read the full study: Wintemute GJ et al. medRxiv 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2022.07.15.22277693>

What is Political Violence?

Political violence is “violence aimed at political ends — controlling or changing who benefits from, and participates fully in, US political, economic and socio-cultural life.”¹ In this survey, we ask US adults about their support for and willingness to engage in “force or violence to advance an important political objective that [they] support,” both in general and when considering specific objectives, types of violence, and potential targets.

Key Findings

Justification of political violence

Nearly **80% of respondents** think political violence “in general” is *never justified*, while **20%** think it is *sometimes, usually, or always justified*.



However, **nearly 80%** do consider violence at *least sometimes justified* to advance one or more of **15 specific** political objectives.

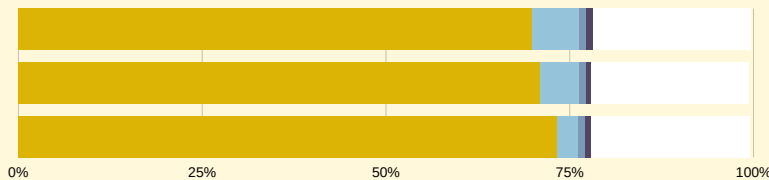


Personal willingness to engage in political violence

Asked of respondents who considered political violence *at least sometimes justified* for specific objectives (percentages based on total sample):

“How willing would you personally be to use force or violence in each of these ways?”

■ Not willing ■ Somewhat ■ Very willing ■ Completely willing ■ Not asked



8% are at least somewhat willing to **threaten or intimidate** a person

7% are at least somewhat willing to **injure** a person

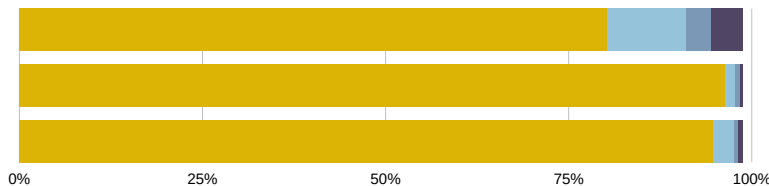
5% are at least somewhat willing to **kill** a person

Anticipated use of a firearm in situations where political violence is perceived as justified

Asked of all respondents:

“How likely is it that you will use a gun in any of the following ways in the next few years — in a situation where you think force or violence is justified to advance an important political objective?”

■ Not likely ■ Somewhat ■ Very likely ■ Extremely likely



19% believe it is at least somewhat likely they will be **armed** with a gun

2% believe it is at least somewhat likely they will **threaten** someone with a gun

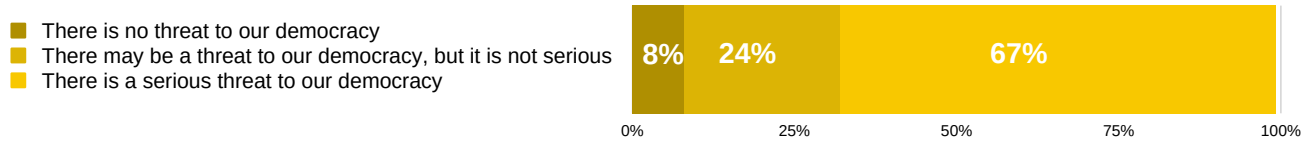
4% believe it is at least somewhat likely they will **shoot** someone with a gun

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding and non-responses.

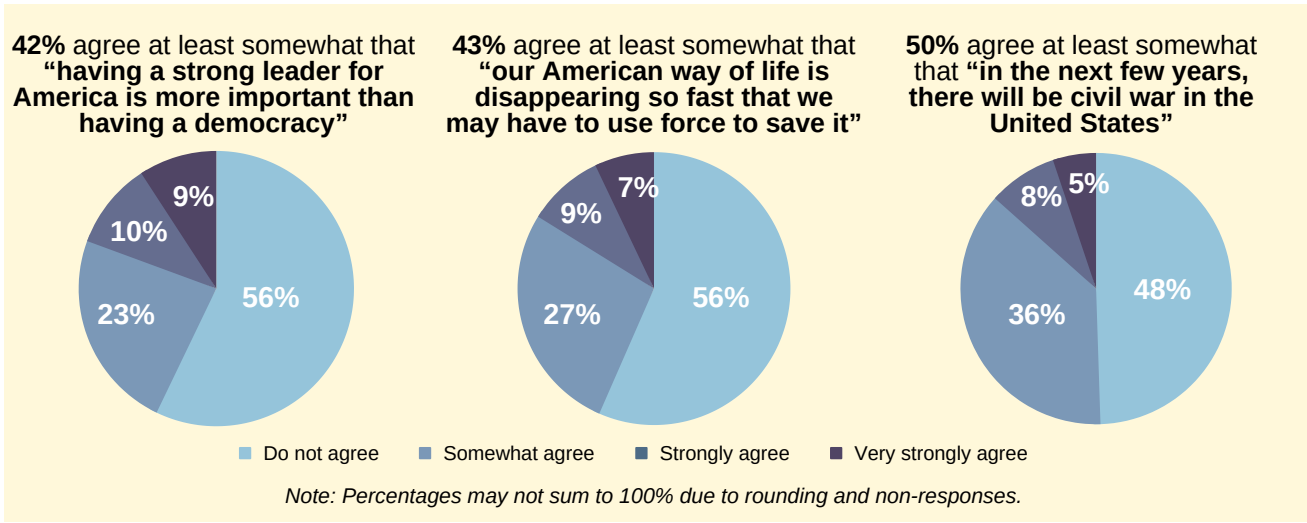
Views on democracy and potential for violence

Asked of all respondents:

“When thinking about democracy in the United States these days, do you believe...?”



Two-thirds believe there is a serious threat to our democracy.



How This Study Expands our Understanding of Political Violence

This report, the first in a series, finds concordance with prior research² and is the first of its kind to explore personal willingness to engage in violence to advance specific political objectives, including questions about:

- Motivations or reasons that may be used to justify the use of force or violence
- Types of violence, from damaging property to threatening, injuring, or killing someone, including firearm use
- Potential targets of violence, including community members, civil servants, and leaders

Methodology

Data are from the 2022 Life in America Survey administered online in English and Spanish from May 13 to June 2, 2022 by the survey research firm Ipsos.³ The main sample included 8,620 respondents, all adult members of the probability-based Ipsos KnowledgePanel. When weighted, the sample is representative of the general adult population of the US.

Sources

1. Ben Itzhak, N.A., Brown, R., & Hurlburt, H. Summary: Building U.S. Resilience to Political Violence. Over Zero. 2019. <https://overzero.ghost.io/building-u-s-resilience-to-political-violence-summary/>.
2. Wintemute, G.J. Guns, violence, politics: the gyre widens. Inj. Epidemiol. 8, 64 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-021-00357-3>.
3. Ipsos. KnowledgePanel®: a methodological overview. <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ipsosknowledgepanelmethodology.pdf>.

The UC Davis Violence Prevention Research Program (VPRP) is a multi-disciplinary program of research and policy development focused on causes, consequences, and prevention of violence. Research areas include firearm violence, social conditions that underlie violence, and connections between violence, substance abuse, and mental illness. Learn more at health.ucdavis.edu/vprp/ or contact Vicka Chaplin at vchaplin@ucdavis.edu.

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